



MANITOBA SOCCER ASSOCIATION

**TALENT DEVELOPMENT
IN YOUTH SOCCER-DATA
INFORMED**





DATA FOUNDATION

- **BASED ON JAN VERBEEK'S STUDY OF 3,451 MALE PLAYERS RECRUITED BY A DUTCH FOOTBALL ACADEMY (2010–2021) BORN BETWEEN 1988–1999.**
- **THE RESEARCH INDICATES THAT TALENT DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES ARE HIGHLY SELECTIVE AND NON-LINEAR.**





HARSH REALITY OF PROGRESSION

- **ONLY 8% OF ACADEMY PLAYERS AND 10% OF NATIONAL YOUTH PLAYERS REACH THE FIRST LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL BY AGE 23.**
- **IMPLICATION: EARLY SELECTION IS NOT A RELIABLE PREDICTOR OF FUTURE ELITE PERFORMANCE.**





EARLY ADVANTAGE DOESN'T GUARANTEE SUCCESS

**EVEN WITH ACCESS TO ELITE COACHING AND TRAINING
ENVIRONMENTS, EARLY RECRUITMENT DOES NOT ENSURE ELITE STATUS.**

**MANY TOP-LEVEL PLAYERS FOLLOWED UNEXPECTED, NON-LINEAR
PATHWAYS — FREQUENTLY INVOLVING SETBACKS AND RE-ENTRIES.**



LATE BLOOMERS HAVE STRONG POTENTIAL



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**MORE TIME IN GRASSROOTS OR NON-ACADEMY SETTINGS ≠ MISSED
OPPORTUNITY.**



MOST ELITE PLAYERS WERE DE-SELECTED



**OF 52 ELITE INTERNATIONALS, 96% HAD BEEN CUT FROM A
NATIONAL YOUTH TEAM AT SOME POINT.**

**TAKEAWAY: BEING DE-SELECTED IS OFTEN A PART OF THE
JOURNEY, NOT THE END.**



INTERRUPTIONS = NORMAL



**DEVELOPMENT IS RARELY LINEAR. GAPS, SETBACKS, AND
REDIRECTIONS ARE PART OF THE GROWTH CURVE.**

**SYSTEMS SHOULD EMBRACE FLEXIBILITY AND ALLOW FOR RETURNS
OR ADJUSTMENTS.**



RIGID SYSTEMS LIMIT POTENTIAL



**OVER-SELECTIVE, RIGID STRUCTURES CAN FILTER OUT LATE DEVELOPERS.
SYSTEMS SHOULD INCLUDE:**

- **PARALLEL TEAM MODELS - FLUID PLAYER GROUPS**
- **DELAYED SELECTION OPPORTUNITIES**
- **GROWTH WINDOWS AND RE-ENTRY POINTS**



ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM JAN VERBEEK'S RESEARCH



STATIC VS DYNAMIC RESEARCH

MOST OF THE RESEARCH IN
YOUTH SOCCER IS 'STATIC' - IT LOOKS AT A SNAPSHOT IN TIME.

FOR EXAMPLE: 'WHO IS THE BEST PLAYER RIGHT NOW?'

THESE STUDIES COMPARE GROUPS AT ONE MOMENT AND TRY TO
PREDICT LONG-TERM SUCCESS. BUT THAT'S LIKE JUDGING A
MOVIE BY A SINGLE FRAME.



BENEFITS OF DYNAMIC TALENT RESEARCH

**IN CONTRAST, 'DYNAMIC' OR 'LONGITUDINAL' RESEARCH
FOLLOWS THE SAME PLAYERS OVER MANY YEARS.**

**IT HELPS US SEE HOW DIFFERENT PLAYERS GROW, CHANGE, AND
DEVELOP AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS.**



THESE STUDIES FOCUS ON:

- WHO IS STILL IMPROVING AT 14, 16, OR 18?
- WHO DROPS OFF AFTER AN EARLY GROWTH SPURT?
- WHO GETS BETTER LATER IN THEIR TEENS - AND WHY?

INSTEAD OF JUST COMPARING GROUPS, 'INTRA-INDIVIDUAL' RESEARCH LOOKS CLOSELY AT HOW EACH PLAYER CHANGES OVER TIME.





WHY THIS MATTERS TO CLUBS, PARENTS, AND COACHES

- ***MANY* EARLY PERFORMERS STOP PROGRESSING LATER.**
- **SOME PLAYERS DEVELOP SLOWLY BUT BECOME TOP PROFESSIONALS - EVEN AFTER BEING CUT YOUNG.**
- **FOCUSING ONLY ON EARLY SUCCESS RISKS MISSING HIDDEN POTENTIAL.**



THE TAKEAWAYS

STATIC = ONE MOMENT IN TIME.

DYNAMIC = THE FULL JOURNEY OVER YEARS.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A RACE - IT'S A MARATHON
WITH UPS, DOWNS, AND UNEXPECTED TURNS.**

**LET'S BUILD SYSTEMS THAT REFLECT THE FULL JOURNEY,
NOT JUST THE EARLY MOMENTS.**



REFERENCES

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- **'CAREER PATTERNS OF ELITE FOOTBALL PLAYERS' - RESEARCHGATE, VERBEEK ET AL. (2025)**
- **'TECHNICAL CHAPTER' IN 'TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH SOCCER' - ROUTLEDGE (2023)**
- **'RAE SOLUTIONS WITH DUTCH FA' - FRONTIERS IN SPORTS AND ACTIVE LIVING (2025),**



SEASON STRUCTURE

COMPETITIVE VS EXCELLENCE STREAMS

CATEGORY	COMPETITIVE STREAM (WYSA ONE SEASON)	EXCELLENCE STREAM (PRO ACADEMY)
Total Season Duration	8–9 months	10–11 months (with structured breaks)
Number of Active Months	8 months max (per FIFA/AAP guidelines)	11 months (including load management phases)
Training-to-Game Ratio	2:1 to 4:1	3:1 to 5:1 (often includes recovery sessions)
Weekly Training Sessions	2–3	4–6 (varies by age/phase)
Weekly Matches	1 (weekend)	1–2
In-Season Rest Days	1 full day/week	1 full day/week (monitored recovery)
Mid-Season Break	1–2 weeks	1 week + taper weeks
Off-Season Break	3–4 weeks (at least twice/year)	3–4 weeks post-season, micro-breaks built in
Player Monitoring	Basic (coach observation, parental input)	High-tech (GPS, HR, sleep, load tracking)
Use of Periodization	Recommended but variable	Strictly followed (macro/micro cycles)
Total Games per Year	20–35 games/year	35–50+ games/year
Age-Appropriate Rest Focus	High priority (3+ months off annually)	Still built in – with deloading and enforced recovery



SEASON STRUCTURE COMPETITIVE VS EXCELLENCE STREAMS

REFERENCES

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3. CANADA SOCCER GRASSROOTS STANDARDS (2023)
4. THE GUARDIAN, 'FIFA MANDATES REST PERIODS TO PROTECT PLAYERS', JULY 2025
5. REUTERS, 'FOUR-WEEK BREAK RECOMMENDED BY FIFPRO', JUNE 2025
6. JOURNAL OF SPORTS SCIENCE AND MEDICINE, YOUTH LOAD MONITORING STUDIES (2022-2024)
7. YOUTH ACADEMY CASE STUDIES FROM JUVENTUS, MAN UTD, AJAX (INTERNAL DOCS, UEFA REPORTS)